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AUTHOR Ledbetter, Rosanna
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ABSTRACT

Reasons for the literacy problem on college and university campuses and the role of higher education in confronting this problem are discussed. Many young people today lack English skills necessary for holding a job, and students entering college are deficient in basic language skills. Some educators feel that college admission standards should be raised in order to pressure high schools to concentrate on developing basic skills. College English departments have been accused of emphasizing literature and not giving enough attention to composition, and departments outside of English have been accused of ignoring poor writing from their students. Some state systems of higher education have mandated tests and/or courses in an attempt to alleviate the problem. The California State University and College (CSUC) system adopted a systemwide proficiency/diagnostic writing exam for entering lower-division students and also required English courses. At San Francisco State University the required sophomore English course could be taught in departments other than English if certain conditions were met. Some California universities have offered inservice training programs for elementary and secondary teachers in order to strengthen the teaching of the basic skills. (SW)

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Dr. Rosanna Ledbetter
Associate Professor of History
Western Illinois University
Macomb, Illinois 61455

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THE ABC'S OF THE LITERACY PROBLEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A. Why is there a literacy problem on college and university campuses?
B. Is literacy the responsibility of higher education?
C. What can colleges and universities do about the problem?

A. Why is there a literacy problem on college and university campuses?

What teacher has not at some point felt despair over the inability of a student to express his or her thoughts in writing or even verbally! The problem has probably been around ever since the first teacher confronted a classroom of pupils, but at no time has there been as much attention directed to it as in the last ten years or so. Articles on literacy multiply monthly: Back to Basics, Why Johnny Can't Read, Why Johnny Can't Write, The Academic Score Decline, Why Nobody Can't Write Good, Is Literacy Really Declining? Conferences, meetings, and workshops on the topic abound. Experts argue over what to do. But, first of all, is there really a problem? Is it true that students are entering college without the basic skills of reading and writing and that some could even be labelled illiterate? Those who concern themselves with the subject don't agree.

One group argues that the problem has always been with us and will continue without surcease, so why worry about it. "The reading and writing skills of most Americans have never been remarkable, and the inability of the average high-school graduate to write three or four clear expository paragraphs has been the object of scornful criticism at least since the time of Mark Twain," says Newsweek.[1] One English

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professor at a midwestern university believes that "an examination of educational conditions over the past hundred years will reveal that the proportion of people who are genuinely literate remains somewhat constant."[2] We attempt to educate the masses and should not then be disappointed when we do not achieve a higher degree of literacy.

Others, however, feel there has been a decline in basic skills and view that decline as a major problem which will increase in magnitude unless measures are taken. The Sloan Foundation addressed itself to the literacy problem in 1976-77 and concluded that "the regression in writing skills over recent years is real."[3] Newsweek lamented that "what makes the new illiteracy so dismaying is precisely the fact that writing ability among even the best-educated young people seems to have fallen so far so fast."[4] Change magazine devoted an entire section in its November 1976 issue to "this cultural morass," that is, literacy. Those who believe the crisis in literacy is real point primarily to the decline in SAT scores as evidence for their concern. From 1964 to 1976, scores on the verbal section of the two-part test dropped from 478 to 429 (49 points) after averaging around 500 between 1941 and 1963. Math scores declined from 502 to 470 (32 points) indicating a problem but one of less intensity than in writing skills. Most of the decline in verbal scores occurred in the first half of the 1970's.

Whether one believes there is a problem in literacy facing the American educational system seems to depend in many respects upon one's definition of the term. When the midwestern English professor cited above said, "there is assuredly no decline in literacy," what he meant was that people who are capable of imaginative and creative writing and are driven

by an inner indescribable force to write are and always have been small in number. He is, of course, probably quite right; but his definition of what constitutes literacy differs considerably from what the average parent or teacher means when they speak of Johnny's inability to write. They mean a much more elementary level of skill and a style of writing more properly described as expository. As journalist Norman Macrae, deputy editor of The Economist, said, "The objective in writing classes should be to teach expository writing, with no ambiguities at all. The purpose is to teach somebody how to write an explanation which will instruct a dumb cluck like me how to repair a television set or a fuse without frying myself."[5] Or as a California professor of English put it, "The clear explanation of exact information in writing is not an arcane art reserved for a small group of intellectual priests called English professors but is, quite simply, one of the marks of an educated man."[6] "The ability to write effective exposition is not a gift," says one novelist, poet, and retired English teacher. "It is a skill that can be learned." If the aim is effective rather than elegant writing, then students entering college "should be able to make themselves clearly understood in simple prose."[7]

The current concern with literacy then is not with those few who will write creative and imaginative prose regardless of the obstacles placed in their paths but rather with the many who need at least enough skill in handling the English language to get and keep a job. True, there are some types of employment which do not require an individual to read or write, but they are the lowest paid jobs and usually lead nowhere in the world of work. If we want to give more students a better chance in life, then we do need to be concerned with the problem revealed by our own experiences with students as well as by declining test scores.

The explanations for the reputed decline in literacy can be divided into those related to social change as a whole and those related to changes within the schools themselves. Television comes in for a large share of the blame. Too much time spent watching the magic screen leaves little time for homework and reading. On the other hand, some maintain, blaming television is merely an argument for impotency. What we should do is make television an ally rather than an enemy. The same elements that go into successful expository writing go into successful expository television: logical process and orderly structure.[8] Why not tie the two together.

Changes in the American family are the real villain, say others. Employed mothers and homes with a single parent often mean less participation of the family in the learning activities of the children and their schools. Add to this what Willard Wirtz termed "a decade of distraction" referring to the 1960's and early 70's when the Vietnam War and campus disruptions drew students from their studies.

Newsweek blamed what it called the "school of structural linguistics," consisting of proponents who claimed that writing was far less important than speech and that students need not, therefore, study the rules of writing.[9] This kind of thinking led many teachers to take the view that standard English is just one dialect among many others and that to insist on its predominance constitutes an act of repression by the white middle class. Even the National Council of Teachers of English adopted a policy statement called "Students' Rights to Their Own Language." Hopefully, we have now come to realize that there is a dominant language in use in the United States and that if one cannot communicate in that dialect, whether in writing or in speaking, then one will be at a distinct

disadvantage in seeking and keeping a job and in rising to a higher level position.

Almost everyone agrees that the heart of the literacy problem is that we are now trying to educate many, many more than before. Only 40% of eighteen-year-olds graduated from high school in the 1940's; now the number is running closer to 85-90%. An advisory panel headed by Willard Wirtz and set up to study the decline in SAT scores reported a huge increase in the number of students in the educational system in the 1950's and 60's. The post World War II baby boom hit the colleges in 1964. At about the same time, we decided to get rid of discrimination in access to educational opportunity. The end result of the increase in students, claim some, was relaxed standards in the schools, including a watering down of course content, questionable automatic promotions, grade inflation, easier texts, a cry for less and easier homework, and an increase in both student absenteeism and class size.

Finally, and perhaps most damning, is the claim that it is the English teachers themselves who are to blame for the decline of literacy in the classroom, though one might wonder why the blame should be laid entirely on English teachers. Why not on the teachers of other subjects as well? Nonetheless, English teachers are accused of having been too lenient in the classroom and of emphasizing creativity over good grammatical construction. "Rules stifle spontaneity" was one of the catch-phrases of the day.

In addition, English teachers are accused of being insufficiently trained to teach composition and reading. Historically, claims the State Deputy Superintendent for Programs in the California schools, "teachers have

not been adequately prepared to teach the composing process."[10] But then where do primary and secondary teachers learn how to teach reading and writing but in the colleges and universities, which brings us to our second question in the ABC's of literacy in higher education.

B. Is literacy the responsibility of higher education?

Colleges and universities have traditionally assumed that students come to them already endowed with some mastery of the English language and are prepared to read, write, listen, and recite in their college classes. That such is not necessarily the case was recognized as early as 1890 when Barrett Wendell developed a course called Freshman English, to be taught at Harvard. His objective, however, was not so much to teach the basic skills as it was to produce men who could read and think critically and write with force and persuasion, a far cry from the objectives of the remedial courses being introduced in colleges throughout the country today.

Nevertheless, most college instructors have continued to maintain that students should come to the campus with the basic skills of reading and writing already a part of their intellectual baggage. Students could cover another half of an academic year's work in the same amount of time if they were adequately prepared in English composition when they enter college, claims Chancellor A. H. Bowker of the University of California at Berkeley. What the universities should do, according to Chancellor Bowker, is raise the standards for admission and thus pressure the high schools to concentrate on developing basic skills. The Berkeley campus has recently moved to implement the Chancellor's recommendation. Professor Bowker may prove to be right in the long run as to the ultimate

solution to the problem of literacy in higher education, but at this point there are few who could or would chose to agree with him. Most community colleges are mandated to maintain an open-door admissions policy and provide assistance accordingly to those who chose to enter. Colleges and universities faced with declining enrollments are more tempted to decrease admissions standards still further than to raise them, and all institutions of higher education are expected to play a role in bringing more disadvantaged students onto the college campus.

"No matter what the causes of illiteracy," says the editor of Change magazine, "the academic community, having some 11 million college students in its trust, can not deny its responsibility in helping set matters right."[11] The editor accused institutions which dealt with the literacy problem by raising admissions standards of "retreating to the ivory tower" and from the responsibility for educating the students under their charge.[12] So like it or not, colleges and universities will, at least until the primary and secondary schools can regain, or gain, an ability to deal with the problem at the primary and secondary levels, have to find ways themselves to deal with students' lack of basic skills. Alex C. Sherriffs, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the California State University and Colleges, laid it on the line when he said:

> There are certain things the public expects us to do that do not correspond to things that we should have to do, to be sure; we in education are today looked to for the answers to all kinds of social problems. Even so, the public is pretty sure that education has something to do with reading, writing, and arithmetic. To the extent that we in the teaching profession, at whatever level or segment, fail in this mission, the public will support us less--and perhaps should.[13]

It is the general feeling in the California State University system that students who show promise in college work but who have not, for one

reason or another, developed the basic skills normally expected of a college-level student at an earlier stage of their education should still be admitted. They should be prompted to develop their other talents while working on the basic skills as well. "None of us," said Sherriffs, "can afford the luxury of pushing off the dilemma we face onto others. To blame the lower school teachers, for example, is to forget that we were the ones who prepared them."[14]

College instructors, as well as primary and secondary teachers, come in for their share of the blame in the literacy debate. English departments in particular are a favorite target of the critics. As a USC professor of English put it, "The English departments that I have known (until very recently) have not been departments of English, but departments of literature."[15] On many campuses, rhetoric has been turned over to the speech department, reading aligned with the school of education, and linguistics left to form its own department. The teaching of composition has been relegated to graduate assistants, to junior English professors who have not yet been delivered from the onerous chore of teaching Freshman Composition, or to senior professors who can no longer attract enough students in their upper-division literature classes. One might have anticipated that this would happen, however, since most English professors have had little training in the teaching of composition. Graduate students in English are trained in criticism and literary history knowing, however, that they will be expected to serve a period of apprenticeship in grammar classes before passing on to the world of literature. Those teachers who express a preference for teaching composition courses have been looked upon with disbelief and disdain. Some graduate English

departments have begun to deal with this problem by offering degrees in rhetoric. The University of Iowa, Indiana University, and the University of Southern California now have such programs. Students can get a similar degree through a confederation of colleges in Texas. One English professor suggests that departments of English assume a new title: the department of reading and writing. "The world can absorb only so many literary scholars," he says. "If we become departments of reading and writing, we may be able to survive."[16] Few, at least at this point, have taken his suggestion seriously, but the idea of a graduate degree in the teaching of rhetoric does seem to be spreading.

English teachers do not bear the burden of accusation alone, however. As one journalist said, "The creeping slobbism which is in many schools cannot be checked so long as a youngster is permitted to get by with sloppy writing in every classroom except one."[17] Professor Paul Roberts, the author of a number of English textbooks, was more specific:

> In the last hundred years there has been a steady decline in the use of writing in the general educational process. It used to be that no one had to teach composition because everybody taught it. The student was writing all the time, not only in his literature course but also in history, in economics, even in science and mathematics. It was every teacher's responsibility and not just the English teacher's, to keep the student up to a respectable standard and to show him how to improve his prose.[18]

As classes grew in size in the 1960's, however, it was easier to relegate the teaching of writing to the English department; use primarily short-answer, objective exams; and grade what essays were given solely for the accuracy of facts. Students quickly became accustomed to this and began to accuse other than English instructors who commented or dared to grade on their composition skills of being grossly unfair. So compart-

mentalized have we become that one history teacher is quoted as having said, "It is unbelievably incredible for someone to write that other professors than in English courses should teach students which is not their job to do."[19] Which brings us to another reason why some college professors outside of English have been content to ignore the subject. As the editor of Change magazine put it, "How can science and sociology professors [among others] evaluate student writing when they tend to write so poorly themselves?"[20] The defects in their own undergraduate and graduate training prevail, and the illiteracy spiral continues.

Departmentalizing scholarly studies has led to many problems for higher education but perhaps none more serious than the segregation of composition from the other disciplines. Perhaps Barnett Wendell did us a great disservice when he instituted Freshman English. English Professor William Leary of the California State University in Los Angeles expressed the dilemma very well at a 1976 Conference on the Improvement of Student Writing Skills:

> In thinking of Freshman Composition as a subject, and in assuming that that subject "belongs" to English departments exclusively, university faculties have gone badly astray, and English departments with them. The worst consequence of this confusion is that nearly everyone on a modern university faculty has officially abnegated all responsibility for teaching students how to write.
>
> The logical corollary of my premise should be apparent. The only attack on the problem of competency in writing that offers any likelihood of success for an entire student body is an all-university attack: the only way to get satisfactory writing from students is for every faculty member to accept no other kind.[21]

To argue that colleges and universities have no responsibility to either the public or their students for ensuring that every university

graduate is literate at this point seems naive. Even those institutions which do introduce more stringent admissions standards will have to deal with the problem until the primary and secondary schools take appropriate action to reenforce the teaching of basic communicative skills. Hopefully, the day will come when colleges and universities will be able to refuse admission to any student who cannot read and write, but that day is not yet upon us. Individual faculty members as well as administrators need to consider what can be done at this time to ensure that no student graduates from a college or university without at least some ability in expository writing.

C. What can colleges and universities do about the problem?

Rare is the campus which has not taken one or more steps to help students who have obvious deficiencies in writing skills. In some cases, entire state systems of higher education have now mandated tests and/or courses of some kind in an attempt to alleviate the problem. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the variety and number of techniques and programs being carried out on the 19 campuses of the California State University and Colleges. In 1975 the Board of Trustees of the CSUC system instructed Chancellor Glenn Dumke to set up a Task Force to study the problem of literacy on the campuses within its jurisdiction and make recommendations as to what could and should be done. Based upon the recommendations it received, in May 1976 the CSUC Board passed a resolution endorsing the concept of a systemwide proficiency/diagnostic writing exam for entering lower-division students and recommending that remedial programs be approved with appropriate workload credit or faculty whether

students received credit or not. In addition, students were to demonstrate their competency in writing skills as a requirement for graduation. How such competency would be demonstrated was left to the discretion of the individual campuses. Finally, the resolution provided for the creation of a second Task Force to continue the study of the literacy problem and make further recommendations to the systemwide Academic Senate, the Chancellor, and the Board of Trustees.

In order to implement the first provision of the Board of Trustees' resolution, a systemwide committee was formed to develop an entry-level exam for lower-division students. The CSUC campuses already had in place what is called the English Equivalency Examination (EEE). The EEE is a high-level test for more advanced entering students who wish to receive graduation credit for as much as two terms of English or at least meet the minimum proficiency requirements of the CSUC system. The examination consists of a 90-minute objective test on literature and a 90-minute essay test composed and graded by CSUC English professors. Most entering students did not previously bother to take the test since no course in English composition was required.* As of Fall 1977, all lower-division entering students were required to take a new English Placement Test (EPT) which was designed to serve as both a proficiency and a diagnostic examination without the possibility of earned credit. It was developed by a six-member systemwide committee in cooperation with the Educational Testing Service and consists of three multiple-choice sections and an essay part

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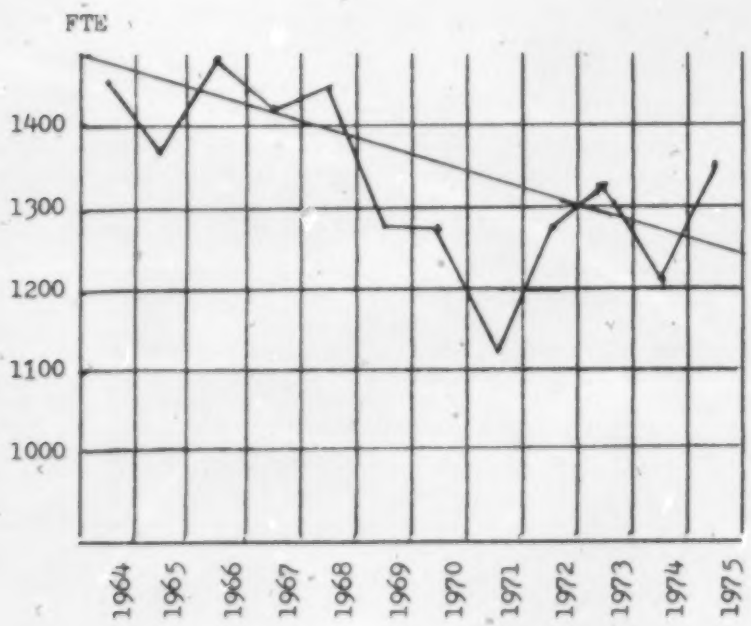
*Of 2,216 students who took the EEE in Spring 1977, 883 received six semester or equivalent quarter units of credit; 1,104 were exempted from the new EPT (English Placement Test); and 229 were required to take the EPT in the Fall.

to be graded by selected English professors from throughout the CSUC system. The test was first administered in August 1977 to somewhat over 12,000 students and again in October to almost 8,000 more. Of those taking the test, at least 40% were found to be in need of remedial instruction. How the campuses were to respond to the indicated need was left up to them.

Many of the CSUC campuses had done away with their required English classes in the late 1960's. The California schools were not alone in this, of course. The Carnegie Commission reported that the number of institutions requiring English for graduation fell from 90 to 72% in five years. As one English professor said, "We forgot what we were about." On his campus, enrollments in English classes plummeted as shown on the following chart:

TREND LINE OF FULL TIME EQUIVALENT CREDITS
Department of English



The recovery in the 1970's reflected a growing concern in the department with obvious student writing deficiencies.

In 1977, on the same campus, the Academic Senate approved new English requirements for all students. It provided for English composition courses at the lower-division level, a junior-level writing skills examination, an upper-division remedial course for those who failed the exam, and an all-university Literacy Committee to make policy recommendations regarding the campus's literacy program. Among the lower-division courses is a two-semester class designed primarily for specially admitted students with extremely serious reading and writing problems. Grading is on either an ABC/No Credit or a Credit/No Credit basis, at the student's option. A one-semester course is required for all entering freshmen except those who pass the EEE or the College Board Advanced Placement Examination, again with grades on the basis of either ABC/No Credit or Credit/No Credit. The third lower-division course is required of all sophomores except those who pass the EEE or the Advanced Placement Exam, and grades are granted on the same basis as in the other classes. The interesting feature of the sophomore-level course is that it can be taught in a department other than English.

One of the most often repeated criticisms of university literacy programs is that they do not include participation by faculty outside of the English department. At a systemwide Conference on the Improvement of Student Writing Skills, May 1976, it was clear that the CSUC system wanted to involve entire campuses in the attempt to deal with the problem

of literacy. In his welcome to the group, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs admitted that the largest contingency present at the conference consisted of English department faculty and students but added that the other disciplines were represented as well. "It is believed by those who set up this Conference that if we are going to have improvement in writing skills, all of us have to be involved. It is a campuswide responsibility."[22]

A number of schools in the CSUC system have tried to involve faculty members in the teaching of composition from disciplines other than English through a variety of techniques. Almost all of the nineteen campuses have introduced individual tutoring programs and created learning or study skills centers staffed with tutors and equipped with programmed instructional materials. Faculty members are urged to send students with obvious writing skills problems to the centers. Tutors are recruited both from the student body and from the professional staff. These services are used primarily on a volunteer basis, however, and even when required, there is still the problem of the recalcitrant student resentful of the added burden of attending tutoring or lab sessions.

A number of other campuses in the CSUC system have tried what are called writing adjuncts. This is an attempt to tie writing skills instruction into courses in academic disciplines other than English composition. The writing adjunct class can take a number of forms. It may be a composition course directly related to the student's future profession, such as a Legal Writing course; or it may be linked to the student's major, such as a business letter writing course. With yet another type of writing adjunct, there is an attempt to tie the teaching of writing skills

directly in with a subject area class. This is an attempt to capitalize on the student's interest, assumedly his or her major field of study, and thereby build interest in writing as well. The regular course is taught by an instructor in the academic discipline; the writing portion is taught by a member of the writing adjunct staff. Writing assignments made in the regular class are used as a basis of study in the adjunct sessions though other materials are added as well. The adjunct classes may consist of sessions on general principles of writing; small group sessions on specific issues, such as discipline-related items; or individual tutorials. One of the strengths of the technique is that the development of writing skills can be tied in with the student's major classes. This, of course, requires cooperation between the faculty of the academic subject area and the writing adjunct staff, usually members of the English department. Unfortunately, such cooperation is not always easy to generate.

Still other campuses in the CSUC system have attempted to bring faculty members outside the English department into the teaching of composition by encouraging them to teach writing skills along with the academic subject matter in the same class. This is difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, most faculty members already feel that the time alloted them in a quarter or semester is too short for the amount of material they are expected to teach. It is just too much to expect them to add a component of English composition to the already overloaded schedule. Added to this is, of course, the amount of paper-grading which must be done. One English department tried to cut down on the time involved in marking students' papers by using cassettes. Unfortunately, they

found the time involved was even longer, about 15 minutes per paper, than the old method. One learns to write by writing which means every day which, of course, means more papers to grade. Thus, campuses which have tried combining the teaching of writing skills with the teaching of an academic discipline in the same class have met with little success. Perhaps at least one current attempt, however, is worth watching.

At San Francisco State University, the Academic Senate issued a Literacy Policy in early 1977 recognizing that "the development and emergence of an effective literacy program is . . . a responsibility shared by all faculty members in the University." In order to put some teeth into the statement, the Senate approved a provision that the required sophomore English course could be taught in departments other than English provided the content of the course was designed primarily for the teaching of writing skills but built on the subject matter of the academic discipline. Departments were invited to submit outlines of proposed or existing courses which could substitute for the standard sophomore English course. Interim criteria for proposed courses were developed. Each class was expected to:

1) have a writing component equal in type, amount, and vigor to the course taught regularly by the English Department but using the instructor's area of expertise,

2) include writing as a demonstrably significant aspect of the course as well as a tool of instruction about the discipline,

3) have a significant portion devoted to a systematic review of sentence structure and paragraph/essay organization and development,

4) be taught by an instructor qualified to teach and evaluate analytic and expository writing.

In order to ensure that the last requirement would indeed prevail, every prospective instructor was to attend a special semester-long faculty seminar before teaching his or her own class. The seminar would be taught by the Director of Reading and Writing from the English Department, and attending instructors would receive faculty workload credit of three units each.

When the University Literacy Committee reviewed the interim criteria and began the process of reviewing proposed courses, it added two criteria of its own reenforcing the four already in existence:

1) The courses were to be 100% "writing" courses. Specific subject matter would serve as a vehicle for promoting thinking and composition skills, not for the study of the particular discipline.

2) In addition, each of the classes was to require at least six out-of-class essays and a total of 5,000 to 6,000 words written by each student.

Ultimately, the Literacy Committee reviewed course proposals from such diverse departments as Design and Industry, Asian-American Studies, Theatre Arts, History, and Data Systems/Quantitative Methods plus a number of others. It seemed difficult to get across the point that the course would have to be primarily a composition class and only secondarily a subject-matter course. A number of proposals were rejected because of this deficiency. Some were resubmitted and approved. The credits earned in each of the courses could be counted as general education units by the student but could not be counted in the major subject matter requirements. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the original proposal for an alternate sophomore English class to be taught other than in the English

Department came from that department itself. It seems the English Department was being accused of empire-building what with all of the required English courses being instituted. The thought was to allow other departments to share in the FTE units which would be generated by the new requirements.

How this program will work remains to be seen, but it is worth watching from the viewpoint of a vigorous attempt to interest and involve faculty outside of the English department in the problems of students struggling to develop basic skills in composition while pursuing their other college studies. A number of other campuses have already inquired about the alternate courses. The English Department at SFSU is perhaps to be applauded for its recognition that there may be faculty in other departments who are capable of teaching composition. I suspect, however, that at least some of them still have their doubts. As one English professor wrote in Change magazine:

> . . . there is no one other than an English teacher who can help students work with vocabulary and logic from the level of the sentence on through to sophisticated problems in analogy and techniques of research, and no place other than the freshman composition course where anyone will try.[23]

This kind of attitude has, of course, discouraged faculty members outside of English from offering to help, even though the National Council of English Teachers once adopted a slogan suggesting that we make "every teacher, in every subject, a teacher of writing."

In its May 1976 Resolution, the Board of Trustees of the CSUC system also decreed that students should demonstrate their competency in writing skills as a requirement for graduation. This provision was not to take effect, however, until Fall 1979. In a system which draws

over 70% of its new undergraduates every year from the community colleges, it seemed important to have some kind of test for competency at the junior level as well as at the freshman level. Each campus was to determine for itself how this would be accomplished. A number of campuses already had a junior-year examination along with an upper-division writing skills course for those who did not meet the minimum requirements on the test. Most of the campuses either strengthened the existing examination or instituted a new one. On one campus, for example, the old junior-level test has been replaced with one called JEPET (Junior English Proficiency Essay Test). Those who do not perform competently on the test are obliged to take the upper-division remedial English course designed to help them fulfill the graduation requirement. Borderline papers in the hour-long, one-question essay examination are scored by a second reader. In some cases, even a third reading might be deemed necessary. Evaluators who serve as readers are reminded that what is being tested is the ability to write exposition--not narrative or polemic. Students who fail the test are then counselled as to what they should do in order to develop sufficiently competent writing skills to permit them to graduate.

Some of the California universities have taken the lead in trying to help their primary and secondary colleagues strengthen the teaching of the basic skills on their respective levels. Since one of the criticisms of the public schools has been that teachers are not trained adequately in the teaching of composition, a number of universities have begun offering inservice training programs, primarily for English instructors. "Some researchers estimate that more than 50 per cent of the nation's secondary-school English teachers did not specialize in English at all

during their college years."[24] Perhaps the most well-known inservice program on the West Coast is the Bay Area Writing Project sponsored by the University of California at Berkeley. In 1974, 25 teachers of writing were invited to the university for a five-week summer session. They studied current research on writing, examined new and practical approaches to teaching it, and developed curriculum materials for their own use. Each was expected to return to his or her respective district and offer similar training to colleagues. With additional funding from the California State Department of Education and from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Bay Area project now offers seven different campus programs and between 20 and 30 school programs annually.[25] The emphasis thus far has been on English teachers; but during the summer of 1977, several teachers from mathematics and social studies were invited to participate. The project is being adopted and adapted by other areas of the country. In 1977, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Los Angeles Basin Writing Council established eight centers similar to those at Berkeley to serve the Los Angeles area. What is important in these new attempts at inservice training is the commitment to cooperation between the universities and the public schools with the objective of solving the literacy problem together. The question of "blame" is assiduously avoided.

We couldn't begin to mention all of the ways in which colleges and universities have tackled the problem of literacy and have thus accepted at least a share of the responsibility for what many view as a serious deficiency among students in what are considered the basic skills, especially writing. Campuses have begun inservice training programs for their own

faculties as well as for public school teachers. Others have experimented with all kinds of basic skills classes from minicourses, three-week sessions on specific problems such as spelling, sentence structure, vocabulary development, and paragraph/essay organization, to four-hour block courses once a week in Freshman English. The latter technique is designed to allow students a sufficient time in class for composition rather than leaving them to struggle alone over homework or to turn it over to others. Some of the procedures and techniques will fail and fall by the wayside; others, however, will be adopted on a wider basis. All will contribute to an expanding awareness of and concern for the development of basic skills among college-level students. I, for one, would like to see more concern on the part of faculty outside of the Department of English. What is important, says the editor of Change, "is what happens once a student has completed a remedial sequence, or, for that matter, a course in Freshman English. . . .. Newly learned skills are fragile; they will only be strengthened through habit."[26]

FOOTNOTES

1. "Why Johnny Can't Write," Newsweek, December 8, 1975, p. 59.

2. George H. Douglas, "Is Literacy Really Declining?" Educational Record, LVII, No. 3, 147.

3. James D. Koerner, ed., The Teaching of Expository Writing: An Exchange of Views. Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, New York, N.Y., 1977, p. 19.

4. Newsweek, p. 59.

5. Teaching of Expository Writing, p. 33.

6. William Leary, Professor of English, California State University, Los Angeles, Proceedings of the Conference on Improvement of Student Writing Skills, sponsored by the Chancellor's Task Force on Student Writing Skills. The California State University and Colleges, Los Angeles, California, June 3-4, 1976, p. 21.

7. Teaching of Expository Writing, p. 62.

8. Ibid., p. 25.

9. Newsweek, p. 60.

10. William E. Webster, Deputy Superintendent for Programs, California State Department of Education, Proceedings, p. 76.

11. Joyce Bermal, ed., "Literacy As a Way of Life," Change, November 1976, p. 8.

12. Ibid., p. 10.

13. Proceedings, p. 1.

14. Ibid., p. 2.

15. W. Ross Winterowd, Professor of English, University of Southern California, Proceedings, p. 4.

16. Ibid., p. 7.

17. John Fischer, "Why Nobody Can't Write Good," Harper's Magazine, February 1964, p. 24.

18. Ibid., p. 21.

19. Ibid., p. 24.

20. Bermal, Change, p. 10.

21. Proceedings, p. 20.

22. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

23. Joan Baum, "The Politics of Back-To-Basics," Change, November 1976, p. 36.

24. Newsweek, p. 61.

25. James Gray and Miles Myers, "The Bay Area Writing Project," Phi Delta Kappan, February 1978, p. 410.

26. Bermal, Change, p. 10.